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Autonomy as a Double-Edged Resource: Perceived Organizational Support, Trust, and Commitment in Korean Hybrid Work

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Abstract: Autonomy is widely assumed to strengthen employee commitment, yet research on hybrid work increasingly points to an “autonomy paradox,” whereby greater latitude over work can also loosen employees’ attachment to the organization. This study examines how autonomy in hybrid work relates to organizational commitment in a Korean context, focusing on perceived organizational support (POS) and organizational trust as relational mechanisms. Survey data were collected from 300 full-time employees working under hybrid arrangements in South Korea. We estimated a serial mediation model using PROCESS (Model 6), with autonomy as the predictor, POS and trust as mediators, organizational commitment as the outcome, and job satisfaction, job demands, demographic variables, and hybrid-work intensity as controls. The results show that autonomy is strongly and positively associated with POS, and that POS strongly predicts both trust and organizational commitment. Autonomy has a positive indirect effect on commitment that operates entirely through POS, whereas indirect paths involving trust are not significant once POS and job satisfaction are taken into account. At the same time, the direct effect of autonomy on commitment becomes significantly negative when POS, trust, and satisfaction are controlled, even though the total (unmediated) effect of autonomy on commitment is nonsignificant. This pattern reveals an autonomy paradox in hybrid work: autonomy simultaneously supports commitment by signaling organizational support and weakens residual attachment by fostering psychological independence. The findings highlight POS as the pivotal mechanism through which autonomy translates into commitment and suggest that, in hybrid work, organizations must design supported autonomy—pairing flexibility with visible, relational support—rather than relying on autonomy alone to sustain employee commitment.

Keywords: *hybrid work; job autonomy; organizational support; job satisfaction; organizational commitment*

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of remote and hybrid work since the COVID-19 pandemic has renewed scholarly and managerial interest in autonomy as a core feature of contemporary jobs. Hybrid work arrangements typically grant employees greater discretion over where, when, and how work is performed, promising enhanced motivation, well-being, and retention. Drawing on classic job-design perspectives, autonomy is commonly treated as a motivational job resource that should foster positive attitudes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Yet emerging evidence on the “autonomy paradox” suggests that autonomy can also intensify work, blur boundaries, and ultimately erode employees’ attachment to their employer.

The present study investigates this tension in the context of Korean employees working in hybrid arrangements. South Korea combines strong technological adoption with a legacy of hierarchical, long-hours work cultures, making it a particularly revealing setting in which to examine how autonomy in hybrid work is interpreted and experienced. While Korean organizations increasingly experiment with flexible work policies, concerns persist that flexibility may weaken control, undermine cohesion, or encourage employees to look elsewhere. Understanding when and how autonomy strengthens—rather than loosens—organizational commitment is thus both theoretically and practically important.

We focus on perceived organizational support (POS) and organizational trust as key relational mechanisms linking autonomy in hybrid work to organizational commitment. Organizational support theory defines POS as employees’ beliefs about the extent to which the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being. POS has been robustly associated with affective commitment, job satisfaction, and positive discretionary behavior, and it is often conceptualized within the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) framework as a central social resource that can offset demands and foster motivation. Organizational trust, in turn, captures employees’ willingness to be vulnerable to the organization based on perceptions of its ability, benevolence, and integrity. Both POS and trust are deeply rooted in social exchange processes and are central to how employees interpret signals embedded in HR practices and work design.

Despite substantial work on hybrid work, autonomy, and social exchange, several gaps remain. First, most quantitative studies continue to treat autonomy as an unequivocally positive resource in hybrid work, emphasizing its motivational benefits while giving less attention to its potential to weaken organizational attachment or encourage mobility. Second, while POS and trust have each been linked to commitment, prior research has rarely modelled them together as part of a relational chain through which autonomy is interpreted, nor tested whether trust adds incremental explanatory power beyond POS in explaining commitment. Third, empirical work on the autonomy paradox remains limited, often qualitative and largely Western, with little evidence from East Asian, high power-distance contexts where autonomy may be interpreted in distinctive ways.

To address these gaps, we draw on JD–R theory and organizational support theory to develop and test a model in which autonomy in hybrid work (a structural job resource) shapes organizational commitment primarily through perceived organizational support and, secondarily, through organizational trust. Using survey data from 300 full-time Korean employees working in hybrid arrangements, we estimate a serial mediation model with autonomy as the predictor, POS and trust as mediators, and organizational commitment as the outcome, controlling for job satisfaction, job demands, demographic characteristics, and hybrid-work intensity. Our results reveal a striking pattern: autonomy has a positive indirect effect on commitment via POS, but a negative direct effect on commitment once POS, trust, and job satisfaction are controlled. Trust emerges as a strong outcome of POS but does not function as an independent mediator between autonomy and commitment when POS and satisfaction are taken into account.

This study makes three main contributions. First, we extend JD–R theory to hybrid work by showing that the commitment-enhancing effects of autonomy are contingent on relational interpretations: autonomy boosts commitment to the extent that it is read as a signal of organizational support, rather than as mere self-management. Second, we clarify

the positioning of organizational trust within social exchange processes, demonstrating that trust operates as a downstream correlate of POS rather than a unique mediator of the autonomy–commitment relationship in this context. Third, we provide quantitative evidence of an autonomy paradox in hybrid work: even as autonomy strengthens commitment via POS, it simultaneously loosens employees’ residual attachment to the organization, consistent with a growing literature on autonomy, independence, and mobility in knowledge and hybrid work. For Korean organizations navigating the transition to hybrid work, our findings underscore the importance of designing supported autonomy—pairing flexibility with visible, relational signals that “the organization has your back”—rather than assuming that autonomy alone is sufficient to secure commitment.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1 Autonomy in hybrid work and organizational commitment

Autonomy has long been considered a core motivational job characteristic. Job design theories posit that control over how work is organized and performed enhances experienced meaningfulness and responsibility, thereby increasing intrinsic motivation and positive attitudes such as job satisfaction and affective commitment. Within the JD–R model, autonomy is typically categorized as a job resource that facilitates goal attainment, reduces demands, and stimulates personal growth, leading to higher engagement and commitment over time.

Hybrid work arrangements heighten the salience of autonomy because employees gain discretion not only over task execution but also over time and place of work. Recent work in hybrid and remote contexts suggests that flexibility and autonomy are central to employees’ willingness to remain with their employer, particularly among younger cohorts who value work–life integration and self-determination. At the same time, hybrid work can exacerbate uncertainty about expectations and visibility, potentially weakening felt obligations to the organization if flexibility is not accompanied by clear support and relational anchoring.

Cross-sectional studies typically find positive bivariate associations between autonomy and affective commitment, including in remote and hybrid settings, consistent with the idea that giving employees more control tends to increase their identification with, and attachment to, the organization. In line with this evidence and JD–R theory, we expect that employees who experience higher autonomy in hybrid work will, on average, report higher organizational commitment. At the same time, our model explicitly allows for the possibility that this relationship is fully or partially mediated by social exchange variables, rather than being strictly direct.

H1: Autonomy in hybrid work is positively related to organizational commitment at the bivariate level.

2.2 Perceived organizational support and trust as relational mechanisms

Organizational support theory conceptualizes perceived organizational support as employees’ global beliefs about the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. When employees perceive high support, they are more likely to reciprocate with affective commitment, increased effort, and long-term orientation toward the organization. Meta-analytic evidence shows that POS is among the strongest attitudinal predictors of affective commitment and job satisfaction, and that it is shaped by HR practices, fairness, leadership, and job conditions that signal organizational care and investment.

In hybrid work, autonomy is a particularly salient feature of job conditions. Granting autonomy can signal that the organization trusts employees, respects their judgment, and is willing to accommodate their personal and professional needs—key sources of POS. In turn, POS should reinforce organizational commitment by fulfilling socioemotional needs for approval, esteem, and belonging, and by anchoring the employee’s identity in the organization. Thus, autonomy in hybrid work may foster commitment primarily indirectly, by functioning as a positive signal that elevates perceived organizational support.

Organizational trust—employees’ willingness to be vulnerable to the organization’s actions—provides a complementary lens on relational dynamics. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman’s integrative model conceptualizes trust as grounded in perceptions of the organization’s ability, benevolence, and integrity. In line with social exchange theory, supportive organizational practices and fair treatment increase trust by indicating that the organization can and will act in employees’ best interests. Empirical work consistently finds that POS is a strong antecedent of trust, and that trust is associated with outcomes such as commitment, citizenship behavior, and reduced turnover intentions.

In hybrid work settings, we therefore expect a relational chain: autonomy → POS → trust → commitment. Autonomy, as a structural resource, signals support; support, in turn, provides a basis for trusting the organization’s motives and capabilities; and both POS and trust are expected to reinforce commitment. Formally, we propose:

H2: Autonomy in hybrid work is positively related to perceived organizational support.

H3: Perceived organizational support is positively related to organizational trust.

H4: Perceived organizational support is positively related to organizational commitment.

H5: Organizational trust is positively related to organizational commitment.

Taken together, H2–H5 imply that POS and trust operate as mediators of the autonomy–commitment relationship. We therefore expect:

H6: Autonomy has a positive indirect effect on organizational commitment via perceived organizational support and organizational trust.

2.3 The autonomy paradox in hybrid work

While traditional job-design and JD–R perspectives frame autonomy as a straightforwardly beneficial resource, recent work has highlighted an autonomy paradox in knowledge-intensive and digitally mediated work. Qualitative studies of professionals using mobile technologies show that workers who gain autonomy over time and place of work often experience intensified work, extended availability expectations, and difficulties boundary-managing their roles. The same autonomy that allows individuals to self-manage can also increase pressure to be constantly reachable and productive, producing strain and, in some cases, detachment from the organization.

In hybrid work, this paradox may be particularly acute. Employees granted high autonomy may become more self-reliant and marketable, less dependent on organizational structures, and more open to external opportunities. In high power-distance cultures such as Korea, where traditional norms emphasize loyalty, hierarchy, and long working hours, autonomy may simultaneously be experienced as a welcome resource and as a signal that the organization expects employees to take greater responsibility for managing their own work and careers. Such interpretations could loosen psychological ties to the organization, even when satisfaction and support are present.

Building on this literature, we conceptualize autonomy as a double-edged resource: it can enhance commitment by increasing perceived organizational support, yet also reduce residual commitment by fostering independence once relational and attitudinal mechanisms are controlled. In statistical terms, this would manifest as a negative direct effect of autonomy on commitment once POS, trust, and job satisfaction are included as mediators and covariates, even if the total indirect effect remains positive.

H7 (autonomy paradox): After accounting for perceived organizational support, organizational trust, and job satisfaction, autonomy in hybrid work will show a negative direct association with organizational commitment.

Combining H1–H7, we thus propose that autonomy in hybrid work will exhibit offsetting pathways to organizational commitment: a positive indirect effect via POS (and potentially trust), and a negative residual direct effect consistent with the autonomy paradox. The empirical model tested in this study, summarized in Figure X (not yet drawn), positions autonomy as a structural job resource whose effects on commitment are largely relational—channeled through how employees interpret the organization’s support and trustworthiness—within a Korean hybrid-work context.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations among the study variables ($N = 300$). On average, employees reported moderate levels of autonomy ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.11$), perceived organizational support ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.82$), trust in the organization ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.83$), job satisfaction ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.93$), and organizational commitment ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.89$). Job demands were slightly below the midpoint of the scale ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.95$). Respondents worked, on average, less than one day per week remotely ($M = 0.81$, $SD = 1.52$), reflecting a relatively light hybrid intensity in this Korean sample.

As expected, autonomy was positively related to perceived organizational support ($r = .58$, $p < .01$), trust ($r = .44$, $p < .01$), job satisfaction ($r = .43$, $p < .01$), and organizational commitment ($r = .30$, $p < .01$). Perceived organizational support showed strong positive associations with trust ($r = .70$, $p < .01$), job satisfaction ($r = .72$, $p < .01$), and commitment ($r = .68$, $p < .01$), consistent with its role as a central social exchange resource. Trust in the organization was positively correlated with both job satisfaction ($r = .56$, $p < .01$) and commitment ($r = .47$, $p < .01$). Job satisfaction was also strongly related to commitment ($r = .70$, $p < .01$).

Job demands were negatively associated with job satisfaction ($r = -.21$, $p < .01$) but were not significantly related to commitment at the bivariate level ($r = -.05$, n.s.). Remote-work days per week correlated positively but modestly with autonomy ($r = .19$, $p < .01$), perceived support ($r = .26$, $p < .01$), trust ($r = .19$, $p < .01$), job satisfaction ($r = .17$, $p < .01$), job demands ($r = .18$, $p < .01$), and commitment ($r = .16$, $p < .01$), suggesting that employees with more remote exposure perceive somewhat better work conditions overall. The gender dummy (coding to be specified in the Methods) was negatively correlated with autonomy, perceived support, job satisfaction, and commitment (rs between $-.20$ and $-.25$, $ps < .01$), indicating systematic gender differences in these outcomes that are statistically controlled in subsequent analyses.

Internal consistency for organizational trust was acceptable (three items; $\alpha = .78$). Reliability estimates for autonomy, perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, job demands, and commitment are reported in the Measures section and were all within acceptable ranges for research in organizational behavior.

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables ($N = 300$)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. AUT_M	3.26	1.11	—	.58**	.44**	.43**	.10	.30**	.17**	.19**	-.23**
2. POS_M	3.22	0.82	.58**	—	.70**	.72**	-.04	.68**	.18**	.26**	-.20**
3. TRU_M	3.47	0.83	.44**	.70**	—	.56**	-.09	.47**	.08	.19**	-.08
4. JS_M	3.41	0.93	.43**	.72**	.56**	—	-.21**	.70**	.13*	.17**	-.21**
5. JD_M	2.87	0.95	.10	-.04	-.09	-.21**	—	-.05	.00	.18**	.02
6. OC_M	3.05	0.89	.30**	.68**	.47**	.70**	-.05	—	.07	.16**	-.25**
7. AGE	2.50	1.12	.17**	.18**	.08	.13*	.00	.07	—	.07	.00
8. Remote	0.81	1.52	.19**	.26**	.19**	.17**	.18**	.16**	.07	—	-.02
9. GENDER	—	—	-.23**	-.20**	-.08	-.21**	.02	-.25**	.00	-.02	—

Note. AUT_M = autonomy; POS_M = perceived organizational support; TRU_M = organizational trust; JS_M = job satisfaction; JD_M = job demands; OC_M = organizational commitment; AGE = age category; Remote = number of remote-work days per week; GENDER = gender (dummy-coded; coding described in Methods).

- $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

3.2 Test of the mediation model

To test the hypothesized process linking autonomy to organizational commitment via perceived organizational support and trust, we used Hayes's (2022) PROCESS macro (version 5.0) for SPSS, specifying Model 6 (serial mediation). Autonomy (AUT_M) was entered as the independent variable, organizational commitment (OC_M) as the dependent variable, perceived organizational support (POS_M) as the first mediator (M1), and organizational trust (TRU_M) as the second mediator (M2). Job demands (JD_M), job satisfaction (JS_M), age, number of remote-work days per week, and gender were included as covariates in all equations. All significance tests were two-tailed and based on 5,000 bootstrap samples with 95% confidence intervals.

3.2.1 Antecedents of perceived organizational support and trust

The first equation predicted perceived organizational support (POS_M) from autonomy and the covariates. The model explained 62.2% of the variance in POS ($R^2 = .62$, $F(6, 293) = 80.42$, $p < .001$). Autonomy was a strong positive predictor of perceived support ($b = 0.22$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = 7.19$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.28]), indicating that employees who experienced greater autonomy perceived the organization as more supportive. Job satisfaction was also positively related to POS ($b = 0.51$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 13.60$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.43, 0.58]), and remote-work days per week showed a smaller but significant positive association ($b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = 2.72$, $p = .007$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.10]). Job demands, age, and gender were not significant predictors of POS in this model.

The second equation predicted organizational trust (TRU_M) from autonomy, POS, and the covariates. This model accounted for 51.3% of the variance in trust ($R^2 = .51$, $F(7, 292) = 44.01$, $p < .001$). Perceived organizational support was a strong and significant predictor of trust ($b = 0.61$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 9.08$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.47, 0.74]): employees who felt more supported reported higher trust in the organization. In contrast, autonomy no longer predicted trust once POS and the other variables were taken into account ($b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 1.50$, $p = .135$). Job demands, job satisfaction, age, and remote-work days were nonsignificant predictors, while gender approached significance ($b = 0.13$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 1.85$, $p = .065$), suggesting modest gender differences in trust that merit further investigation.

Together, these results support a pathway whereby autonomy primarily enhances perceived organizational support, and support in turn fosters trust. Autonomy's influence on trust appears to be largely indirect via POS rather than direct.

3.2.2 Predictors of organizational commitment

The focal outcome equation predicted organizational commitment (OC_M) from autonomy, POS, trust, and the covariates. The model accounted for 59.3% of the variance in commitment ($R^2 = .59$, $F(8, 291) = 52.94$, $p < .001$). As shown in Table 2, both perceived organizational support and job satisfaction were strong positive predictors of commitment:

- POS $\rightarrow$ OC: $b = 0.51$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 6.82$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.36, 0.65]
- JS $\rightarrow$ OC: $b = 0.44$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 8.18$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.33, 0.55]

In contrast, organizational trust did not uniquely predict commitment when POS and job satisfaction were included ($b = -0.04$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = -0.66$, $p = .51$, 95% CI [-0.15, 0.08]), suggesting that its bivariate association with commitment is largely accounted for by shared variance with support and satisfaction.

Importantly, the direct effect of autonomy on commitment in this model was significantly negative ($b = -0.14$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = -3.74$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.22, -0.07]$) once POS, trust, job satisfaction, and the covariates were controlled. Job demands showed a small positive relationship with commitment ($b = 0.08$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 2.14$, $p = .033$, 95% CI $[0.01, 0.15]$), consistent with possible “challenge demand” effects when other resources are held constant. Gender was also a significant predictor ($b = -0.20$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = -2.82$, $p = .005$), indicating systematic differences in commitment across gender categories after accounting for the main predictors; age and remote-work days were not significant.

Table 2
Regression results for mediators and outcome (PROCESS Model 6)

Outcome: POS_M ($R^2 = .62$, $F(6, 293) = 80.42$, $p < .001$)

Predictor	b	SE	t	p	95% CI
Constant	0.58	0.21	2.80	.005	[0.17, 0.99]
AUT_M	0.22	0.03	7.19	<.001	[0.16, 0.28]
JD_M	0.03	0.03	0.87	.386	[-0.04, 0.09]
JS_M	0.51	0.04	13.60	<.001	[0.43, 0.58]
AGE	0.03	0.03	1.27	.205	[-0.02, 0.09]
Remote	0.06	0.02	2.72	.007	[0.02, 0.10]
GENDER	-0.02	0.06	-0.31	.757	[-0.14, 0.10]

Outcome: TRU_M ($R^2 = .51$, $F(7, 292) = 44.01$, $p < .001$)

Predictor	b	SE	t	p	95% CI
Constant	1.08	0.24	4.47	<.001	[0.60, 1.56]
AUT_M	0.06	0.04	1.50	.135	[-0.02, 0.13]
POS_M	0.61	0.07	9.08	<.001	[0.47, 0.74]
JD_M	-0.05	0.04	-1.38	.168	[-0.13, 0.02]
JS_M	0.09	0.05	1.68	.093	[-0.02, 0.20]
AGE	-0.04	0.03	-1.39	.165	[-0.10, 0.02]
Remote	0.01	0.02	0.39	.697	[-0.04, 0.06]
GENDER	0.13	0.07	1.85	.065	[-0.01, 0.27]

Outcome: OC_M ($R^2 = .59$, $F(8, 291) = 52.94$, $p < .001$)

Predictor	b	SE	t	p	95% CI
Constant	0.66	0.25	2.67	.008	[0.17, 1.14]
AUT_M	-0.14	0.04	-3.74	<.001	[-0.22, -0.07]
POS_M	0.51	0.07	6.82	<.001	[0.36, 0.65]
TRU_M	-0.04	0.06	-0.66	.507	[-0.15, 0.08]
JD_M	0.08	0.04	2.14	.033	[0.01, 0.15]
JS_M	0.44	0.05	8.18	<.001	[0.33, 0.55]
AGE	-0.03	0.03	-1.05	.295	[-0.09, 0.03]
Remote	-0.01	0.02	-0.35	.727	[-0.05, 0.04]
GENDER	-0.20	0.07	-2.82	.005	[-0.33, -0.06]

Note. AUT_M = autonomy; POS_M = perceived organizational support; TRU_M = organizational trust; JS_M = job satisfaction; JD_M = job demands; OC_M = organizational commitment. AGE = age category; Remote = number of remote-work days per week; GENDER = gender.

3.2.3 Total, direct, and indirect effects of autonomy on commitment

Table 3 summarizes the total, direct, and indirect effects of autonomy on organizational commitment from the PROCESS analysis. The total effect of autonomy on commitment, without mediators in the model, was negative but not statistically significant ($b = -0.04$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = -0.96$, $p = .34$, 95% CI $[-0.11, 0.04]$). When POS and trust were included as mediators, however, the direct effect of autonomy on commitment became significantly negative ($b = -0.14$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = -3.74$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.22, -0.07]$). This pattern indicates a suppression effect: autonomy has offsetting positive and negative pathways to commitment that cancel out in the total effect.

The total indirect effect of autonomy on commitment via the three specified paths was positive and significant (indirect effect = 0.11, bootstrapped SE = 0.02, 95% CI $[0.06, 0.15]$). Decomposing this total effect showed that the only significant indirect pathway was the simple mediation through perceived organizational support (AUT → POS → OC; effect = 0.11, bootstrapped SE = 0.02, 95% CI $[0.07, 0.16]$). The indirect pathway through trust alone was not significant (AUT → TRU → OC; effect = -0.00, 95% CI $[-0.01, 0.01]$), nor was the serial pathway through POS and trust (AUT → POS → TRU → OC; effect = -0.01, 95% CI $[-0.03, 0.01]$).

Taken together, these results reveal an “autonomy paradox”: autonomy contributes positively to commitment by enhancing perceptions of organizational support, but once support, trust, and job satisfaction are accounted for, higher autonomy is associated with lower residual commitment, consistent with the idea that autonomy also empowers employees to adopt a more independent, less organization-bound stance.

Table 3
Total, direct, and indirect effects of autonomy (AUT_M) on organizational commitment (OC_M)

Total effect of AUT_M on OC_M (no mediators)				
Effect	SE	t	p	95% CI
-0.04	0.04	-0.96	.340	$[-0.11, 0.04]$
Direct effect of AUT_M on OC_M (with mediators)				
Effect	SE	t	p	95% CI
-0.14	0.04	-3.74	.0002	$[-0.22, -0.07]$
Indirect effects of AUT_M on OC_M (bootstrapped, 5,000 samples)				
Path	Effect	Boot SE	95% CI	
Total indirect	0.11	0.02	$[0.06, 0.15]$	
Via POS_M (AUT → POS → OC)	0.11	0.02	$[0.07, 0.16]$	
Via TRU_M (AUT → TRU → OC)	-0.00	0.00	$[-0.01, 0.01]$	
Via POS_M and TRU_M in series (AUT → POS → TRU → OC)	-0.01	0.01	$[-0.03, 0.01]$	

Note. Effects and standard errors for indirect paths are based on bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals with 5,000 resamples (Hayes, 2022). POS_M = perceived organizational support; TRU_M = organizational trust.

Overall, the results support a model in which autonomy in hybrid work primarily promotes organizational commitment by increasing perceived organizational support, while simultaneously exerting a negative residual direct effect on commitment once social and attitudinal mechanisms are controlled. Organizational trust emerges as a strong outcome of perceived support but does not function as an independent mediator between autonomy and commitment when POS and job satisfaction are taken into account.

4. Discussion

4.1 Summary of key findings

This study set out to examine how autonomy in hybrid work relates to organizational commitment among Korean employees, focusing on perceived organizational support and organizational trust as central relational mechanisms. At the bivariate level, autonomy was positively associated with commitment, in line with traditional job-design and JD–R perspectives. However, the multivariate analyses paint a more nuanced picture. Autonomy was strongly and positively related to perceived organizational support, and POS in turn emerged as a powerful predictor of organizational commitment. POS also strongly predicted organizational trust, and both POS and trust showed substantial zero-order correlations with commitment.

When we modelled these variables in a serial mediation framework, autonomy exhibited a significant positive indirect effect on commitment that was entirely channeled through POS. The indirect paths involving trust—either on its own or in series with POS—were not statistically significant once POS and job satisfaction were controlled. At the same time, the direct effect of autonomy on commitment became significantly negative once POS, trust, and job satisfaction were included in the model, even though the overall total effect of autonomy on commitment (without mediators) was nonsignificant. This configuration indicates a suppression pattern and supports the existence of an autonomy paradox in hybrid work: autonomy simultaneously enhances commitment through its positive implications for perceived support and weakens residual attachment by fostering psychological independence and mobility.

Taken together, these findings suggest that autonomy in hybrid work is best understood as a double-edged resource. On the one hand, it functions as a powerful signal of organizational support, which in turn drives commitment. On the other hand, once employees feel supported and satisfied, higher autonomy appears to loosen their remaining attachment to the organization, consistent with the notion that autonomy encourages a more self-reliant, less organization-dependent stance.

4.2 Theoretical implications

This study contributes to theory in several ways. First, it extends the Job Demands–Resources framework to hybrid work by clarifying how a structural job resource—autonomy—translates into organizational commitment. Rather than exerting a uniformly positive effect, autonomy’s commitment-enhancing influence operates primarily through perceived organizational support, a social and relational resource. This finding underscores that the meaning employees attach to autonomy is crucial: autonomy boosts commitment to the extent that it is interpreted as evidence that the organization values and cares for them, rather than as a mere shift of responsibility or control. In other words, autonomy in hybrid work is not a resource in isolation but a cue embedded in a broader relational context.

Second, the results refine our understanding of organizational trust within social exchange processes. Trust was strongly predicted by POS and displayed substantial bivariate associations with commitment; nevertheless, it did not operate as an independent mediator of the autonomy–commitment relationship once POS and job satisfaction were taken into account. In this sample, trust appears to function more as a downstream correlate of perceived support than as a distinct explanatory mechanism for commitment. This challenges simple assumptions that trust invariably occupies a central mediating position and suggests that, in contexts where POS and satisfaction are already high, trust may add relatively little incremental explanatory power. Future theorizing may benefit from positioning trust more explicitly as one of several relational states that emerge from perceived support, rather than as a universal mediator.

Third, the study provides quantitative evidence of an autonomy paradox in hybrid work. The pattern of a nonsignificant total effect, positive indirect effect via POS, and negative direct effect after controlling for relational and attitudinal

mechanisms aligns with qualitative accounts of professionals who experience autonomy as both empowering and demanding. Our results suggest that as employees gain autonomy in hybrid work, they may become more capable of structuring their work and managing their careers independently of the organization. Once their need for support and satisfaction is met, additional autonomy appears to reduce their felt obligation to remain attached to a single employer. This contributes to emerging discussions of psychological independence and mobility in flexible work arrangements, highlighting that autonomy can simultaneously deepen and erode organizational attachment.

Finally, by examining these dynamics in a Korean context, the study adds a cultural dimension to research on autonomy and commitment. South Korea's combination of high technological sophistication and enduring hierarchical, long-hours norms creates a distinctive environment in which autonomy may be experienced as both highly valuable and somewhat atypical. Our findings suggest that even in such contexts, autonomy is interpreted through the lens of perceived organizational support and can generate a commitment-enhancing effect when embedded in supportive practices. At the same time, the negative residual effect of autonomy on commitment indicates that cultural traditions of loyalty do not fully offset the independence that autonomy affords, raising important questions about how hybrid work may reshape psychological contracts in East Asian settings.

4.3 Practical implications

The findings have several implications for the design and management of hybrid work. Most importantly, they caution against treating autonomy as a simple, stand-alone solution for enhancing commitment. Autonomy appears to strengthen organizational commitment only when it is embedded in a climate of visible support. Granting employees freedom over where, when, and how they work should therefore be accompanied by clear signals that the organization continues to provide resources, guidance, and care. This includes fair and transparent HR practices, responsive supervision, access to needed tools and information, and ongoing dialogue about expectations and well-being.

For managers, the results suggest that the objective is not autonomy per se but supported autonomy. When employees experience autonomy as a sign that the organization trusts them and has their back, they are more likely to reciprocate with stronger commitment. If, however, autonomy is implemented in a “hands-off” manner—without adequate support, feedback, or relational engagement—it may simply facilitate psychological distancing and increase employees' sense of marketability and external options. Organizations should therefore monitor not only levels of autonomy but also employees' perceptions of support and clarity about how flexibility fits into the broader employment relationship.

The findings also point to a subtle risk: highly autonomous employees may be both the most capable and the most mobile. Organizations would be well advised to pair autonomy with relational and developmental anchors that sustain attachment, such as internal career paths, opportunities for meaningful contribution, mentoring relationships, and participation in important decision-making. For Korean organizations in particular, which are navigating hybrid work within a traditionally hierarchical, long-hours culture, designing hybrid policies that explicitly communicate care and investment—rather than mere cost-saving or control motives—will be critical. Autonomy can be a powerful asset, but only when employees experience it as part of a supportive, trustworthy organizational relationship.

4.4 Limitations and directions for future research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the data are cross-sectional and based on self-reports, which limits causal inference and raises the possibility of common method variance. Although the pattern of mediation we observe is theoretically grounded and consistent with prior longitudinal and meta-analytic evidence on POS and commitment, future research using longitudinal designs, multi-wave surveys, or multi-source data (e.g., supervisor-rated commitment or performance) would strengthen confidence in the temporal ordering of autonomy, relational perceptions, and outcomes.

Second, the study is based on a single-country sample of Korean employees. While this enhances internal consistency and allows us to speak directly to the Korean hybrid-work context, it also constrains the generalizability of the findings.

Cross-cultural comparative studies could test whether the autonomy paradox observed here is stronger in high power-distance or long-hours cultures, or whether similar patterns emerge in more egalitarian and low power-distance settings. Such work would help clarify the extent to which supported autonomy is a universally effective strategy versus one that operates differently across institutional and cultural environments.

Third, the sample may be unevenly distributed across sectors and occupations, which we did not explicitly model. Future research could examine whether the dynamics identified here vary by industry, job type, or professional status, and whether fully remote arrangements differ from hybrid ones in how autonomy, support, and trust translate into commitment. In highly specialized or boundaryless careers, for example, the negative direct effect of autonomy on commitment might be even more pronounced.

Finally, the model estimated in this study focused on autonomy, POS, trust, and job satisfaction, controlling for job demands and demographics. Other theoretically relevant variables—such as leadership style, perceived job security, employability perceptions, or individual differences in need for autonomy—may moderate the relationships uncovered here. Future work could test alternative causal orderings (e.g., trust as an antecedent rather than an outcome of POS), incorporate additional outcomes (such as turnover intentions, extra-role behavior, or well-being), and explore moderators that determine when autonomy functions primarily as a resource and when it acts as a catalyst for psychological detachment.

Despite these limitations, the present study advances understanding of how autonomy operates in hybrid work by highlighting the central role of perceived organizational support and by documenting an autonomy paradox in a Korean context. It underscores that autonomy is most effective when it is relationally grounded and that organizations seeking to leverage hybrid work must move beyond a narrow focus on flexibility toward the design of genuinely supported autonomy.

Conclusion

This study examined how autonomy in hybrid work relates to organizational commitment in a Korean context, focusing on perceived organizational support and organizational trust as key relational mechanisms. Using survey data from 300 full-time employees and a serial mediation model estimated with PROCESS, we found that autonomy does not simply translate into higher commitment. Instead, autonomy primarily promotes commitment indirectly, by enhancing perceived organizational support, which in turn strongly predicts commitment. At the same time, once perceived support, trust, and job satisfaction are taken into account, the direct effect of autonomy on commitment becomes significantly negative. This pattern reveals an “autonomy paradox”: autonomy simultaneously functions as a valued resource that fosters commitment via support, and as a force that loosens residual attachment to the organization.

Theoretically, our findings contribute to ongoing debates about resources and relational dynamics in hybrid work. First, they underscore the centrality of perceived organizational support as the pivotal social resource through which autonomy shapes employees’ attitudes. While autonomy is often celebrated as an inherent driver of positive outcomes, our results indicate that its commitment-enhancing effects depend critically on whether employees interpret autonomy as a sign of genuine organizational support. Second, we show that organizational trust, although strongly predicted by perceived support, does not operate as an independent mediator between autonomy and commitment once support and job satisfaction are controlled. In high-support, relatively satisfied work contexts, trust may function more as a corollary of support than as a distinct explanatory mechanism for commitment. Finally, by uncovering a negative residual effect of autonomy on commitment, our results speak to the emerging literature on the autonomy paradox and psychological independence: as employees experience greater autonomy, they may also feel more self-reliant and mobile, reducing their felt need to remain attached to a single organization.

Practically, the results caution managers against treating autonomy as a “plug-and-play” solution for commitment problems in hybrid work. Autonomy appears to enhance organizational commitment only when it is embedded in a climate of visible support—accessible resources, fair procedures, responsive supervisors, and clear communication. Without such a supportive frame, autonomy risks functioning as a double-edged sword: it can increase employees’ marketability and sense of independence while quietly eroding their willingness to stay. For Korean organizations navigating the transition to hybrid work within a traditionally hierarchical and long-hours culture, the key implication is that supported autonomy, rather than autonomy alone, should be the design target. This involves pairing flexibility with strong relational signals that “the organization has your back,” while also creating career paths and relational anchors that keep highly autonomous employees engaged and committed over time.

Future research can build on these findings in several ways. Longitudinal and multi-source designs would help establish temporal ordering and reduce concerns about common method variance. Cross-cultural comparisons could test whether the autonomy paradox observed here is amplified in high power-distance or long-hours cultures, or whether similar patterns emerge in more egalitarian contexts. Further work might also examine other outcomes, such as turnover intentions, extra-role behavior, or performance, and explore moderators—such as leadership style, perceived job security, or individual differences in need for autonomy—that may shape when autonomy functions primarily as a resource versus when it becomes a catalyst for psychological detachment. By deepening our understanding of how autonomy, support, and trust jointly shape commitment in hybrid work, such research can help organizations design more sustainable, relationally grounded forms of flexibility in the post-pandemic workplace.

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